A Conversation with Susanne Guthrie

Down East Change Project

July 15, 2023

Interview by Tara Hinton

Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center

TARA HINTON (TH): I'd like to start out by saying the date. So July 15, right? July 15 2023. And this is Tara Hinton interviewing Mrs. Susanne Guthrie. Right. So I usually just like to start out by asking you did tell me a bit about yourself and when you were born and who your parents were.

SUSANNE GUTHRIE (SG): I was born in Morehead City, but here in Harkers Island all my life. My parents were Floyd and Marguerite Yeomans. Floyd was a local Harkers Island person, and she was from Morehead. And he was the postmaster here for 34 years. And I went to school here and Smyrna, high school and then I went to Atlantic Christian College, which is now Barton, and then came back here and taught school for 31 years.

TH: When did you come back here?

SG: After college, which was 1966. I started teaching in 1966. Sixty-six, sixty-seven—I taught at Morehead, and sixty-seven, sixty-eight started here.

TH: That's a long time to teach. Wow.

SG: It is. And that's kinda the gist of who I am.

TH. The gist of it. Okay. So yeah, you've been Down East for a while then, and you know the community.

SG: 79 years.

TH: Wow. That's incredible. What was --did you have any siblings growing up?

TH: I have two brothers. One is deceased and the other one's still living. They didn't stay local. One moved to Newport, North Carolina, and the other one lives in Greenville.

TH: Okay, and were they-- how much older or younger were they?

SG: We were all three years apart.

TH: And your parents, what did they do?

SG: My dad was postmaster. My mother worked at the post office with him. She was supported. Okay. So they had the post office.

TH: Okay, great. And just generally what was-- what was your childhood like growing up? What kind of things did you do for fun?

SG: Well, we were outdoors most of the time. Climbing trees and outdoors things.

TH: Did you do any fishing at all?

SG: Yeah, fishing and clamming and oysters. All the little things that children did outdoors in those days.

TH: Do you do much clamming or fishing now?

SG: I do some now. Of course, the older I am the less I do. I don't have a boat now to go over to the Banks to go clammin'—there's not that many clams right around here anymore.

TH: That's what that's what I heard—I was interviewing someone the other day and they said not many anymore. Do you know why?

SG: I don't know why. I guess it's just more people picking them up. There used to be a lot of sand dollars out here, covered with sand dollars. And they just keep getting picked up and picked up and picked up, so now it's very seldom you find a sand dollar. And in the '50s and '60s, just everywhere you step as a sand dollar. But you can pick them all up, get the seed and [inaudible].

TH: Well, since you've lived here for so long, I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit about the change in the natural environment that you've seen here.

SG: Well, the natural environment, the tide's get higher. This house has been here think they started building it probably in '39. They moved in it in '44. And over the years, the tide would come up in the yard and around the house—in only hurricanes would it go in the house. Now the tide comes up in the yard and around the house in just north winds and full moons, which it didn't do when I was growing up. It was only during hurricanes that it came up all around the house. So now, it'll come up—hurricane will come up and it will go right on down to the Park Service road. Good distance.

TH: And how often do you see just flooding in general happening around?

SG: Mostly on—I would say just about every full moon. And maybe it's a full moon and the wind's not going North, it won't come up as high. But like last week, it was up in part of the yard over under my chicken coop, and that's the low area.

TH: And does it impact your ability to just to get out and to drive? What do you do when it's flooding here?

SG: It hasn't that much. Back in May, it came up. The wind was coming from the North, I didn't realize it was full moon, and tide –looked up and the car, it was over to the car. So I had to move the car down. But at that time, I hadn't looked out, I didn't realize it was coming out that much. Of course, in hurricanes, it comes up so I have to move the car.

TH: I know Karen was telling me a little bit about how this house wasn't raised before Florence. Can you tell me a little bit about that, having to raise the house?

SG: Like when it when it wasn't raised --I had an exchange student we were just sitting around waiting. She was going to a tennis match, and we were just in the house talking and we went out to leave and looked and the tide was all around the house. So we had to take our shoes off and wait 'till it was gone, dry our feet off, then put shoes back on go to the tennis match, but I at that time I didn't—hadn't—realized that the tide was coming in that much. But it does. It had never been in the house until Florence. In hurricane Florence, it came in the house 'bout half an inch, an inch, and I was here I was able to mop it up fast so I didn't get any major damage. But that was a wake-up call that, yes, you are going to have to raise the house. Because we've been talking about for years, and we figured it was an expensive thing—which it was—and we'd say we need to raise the house because it's gonna flood again. And we just put things off. We'll do that later. So after Florence [inaudible], had to be raised.

TH: What did you do? Who did you get to do the raising? Is there a company that you used to?

SG: Company called DeVooght out of New Jersey. Which they have now they have an office in Bridgeton near New Bern because they've raised a lot of houses, and they were excellent. When they came, the beams underneath –hooked all the beams up to hydraulic pumps and had some sort of hydraulic thing in this truck and just went there and pressed buttons and the house was raised.

TH: How long did that take, the whole process

SG: When they started it, it took about a day to get it up. Now, it took them, took them several days to get all these huge iron beams under it and get it ready. I don't know really how long they were actually here—maybe two or three weeks.

TH: Were you still living in the house at the time?

SG: No. I had to move out because they had to cut the electricity and all that off. So I had a summer kitchen right next to it. And then I had a storage house, so I stayed in them for the time.

TH: That must have been a little bit stressful though, I can imagine.

SG: Well, they started in May. First week of May. And then they got it raised, and then it was it just took forever to get workers to come finish like the blockwork and all that kind of stuff. So I didn't move back in until December, first of December. So, I was thinking I was still gonna be in that shed Christmas.

TH: That would have made for a different Christmas, right.

SG: It would. But I was able to make it back in.

TH: Do you typically have family over here for Christmas? Or do you go to grandchildren? Okay. How many grandchildren do you have?

SG: Well, we didn't have any children of our time but we had foreign exchange students. We had nine foreign exchange students and we've kept up with them all the years. So I have nine exchange students and eleven grandchildren, and one will be born in August. And one of my students is moving here in August. She was able to get a green card for a green card for us. She and her husband and her little boy are moving here in August. They're coming here first, and then they've got to decide where they want to go in the United States and what they want to do. Big decision.

TH: Yeah. Do you want them to stay here?

SG: But this is everything for them. Well, they've got to stay where they can get the job Can't get a job around here I don't think. She's a journalist. She's still working for that mathematics thing in Finland, so she can do that for a while while she's here, but eventually she's going to have to get something here. So that'll be real interesting to see.

TH: I'm sure, but it must be nice that they'll be here for a little bit at least.

SG: It is an undertaking to get up leave your country and go somewhere else.

SG: She's trying to decide what to bring. I was over there in March and so I brought a suitcase full of their stuff with me when they I came back, but they can just find the basic stuff and get everything once they need it. A car, a job, and a house.

TH: Just the little things, right?

SG: Just the little things—a car, a job, and a house.

TH: Well I hope they have the best luck doing that, I do.

SG: She's extremely outgoing. If anyone can do it, she can do it. And then you think about the people who left for Europe during the war and came over here to escape, and they didn't think they would ever go back. I mean, at least she can go back anytime. She doesn't have to stay, and she knows her family and friends are still gonna live there. When they got on those ships, they didn't have any idea when they would be going back or who was gonna be left. So that must have been really bad feeling.

TH: I want to actually go back and ask you because you said you were a teacher—what did you teach? My mom's a teacher.

SG: I taught first grade—first through fourth at different times. I didn't end up teaching any higher than fourth. good age group. I never taught kindergarten.

TH: That's a good age group.

TH: So teaching down here—what was that like?

SG: It was really nice to teach. The children with good parents were easy. If you had any problems, all you needed to do was call them and they'd come right then, do whatever. If you needed anything, they'd get it [pause] somehow. Just like Karen got that museum. Parents here have the same drive like that Karen has; if we see something that needs to be done, I think we'll do it somehow. Of course if anybody got sick, you call their mother to come get them. If you couldn't find a mother, there was always a grandmother or aunt or someone that would come get them so you didn't have to worry about that. And we've had good teachers and principals to work for.

TH: Do you think that's still the same now?

SG: From what I hear now, it's not that much the same. The teachers I talked to say it's so much better probably back in the days.

TH: Do they say better how?

SG: I think the administration—the higher ups—are putting too much too much testing. That was coming at the end of when I was there, but not as much probably as it is now.

TH: Even when I was in school.

SG: And so here, school's not that big. So then they moved the sixth seventh and eighth grade over Smyrna. Move some of the Otway kids and the lower grades here, so it's not really that much of a local school probably as it was.

TH: Do you think there were a lot of benefits to having that like local feeling to the school?

SG: Yeah, it was more hometown. And we had sixth seventh and eighth grade here along with the kindergarten first graders, but they existed together. If eighth grade saw a kindergartener or first grader or second grader running down the hall, he'd said he'd stop them: "Don't run." And they never --they always took up for the little kids that they knew because it was their brothers and sisters and relatives. So they watched out for them. So I don't know how it is now. And it's probably not the same. Change happens, and I'm sure when I was there, it wasn't the same as it was in the forties. We lied to everybody, and gave them a shot.

TH: I can't imagine them doing that now.

SG: Nope, they wouldn't do that now.

TH: So, Ms. Guthrie, would you say that you're a Down Easter? I wanted to ask.

SG: Yeah. My mother was from Morehead, so she was from off. So it was always that your mother was from off. So it was—we had kinda a special thing growing up, like we were mixed.

TH: So did you --I mean growing up did you feel like you were from Down East or did that, your mother being from off?

SG: Yeah. Because then when I went to Morehead to visit my cousins and grandmothers, you know, it was like I'm from Down East. But not really from here. [laughs]

TH: Such a special place. I'm learning.

SG: Well we were real brown because we were outdoors all the time, and my skin just was the type skin that just turned brown. So I was much brighter than my cousins who lived in town. They'd always make note of that. Usually if you're brown, you're from Down East. Like the sun must be hotter or something [laughter].

TH: Like they weren't the same—

SG: I was just out in the yard and out in the water all the time. Was bound to be round in [inaudible]. But they'd teach me about that. It's like I was coming from the jungle [laughter].

TH: Yeah, like Down East was a separate country or something?

SG: Yeah, right.

TH: I'm wondering how you would describe Down East to someone who's like me who's not from here, from the area?

SG: Well, it's more—It's quieter. It's not as busy. People are friendlier to each other. Everybody knows everybody. Of course, that's changing. Minute by minute.

TH: Where do you see that change?

SG: Cause when I was a child, you were out playing in the neighborhood or whatever, and you were doing something not right, the mothers there would tell on you. Or if you got hurt, they'd bring in our house and put a Band-Aid on you. But now, if you're playing out, you wouldn't really know who they were and they wouldn't bring you in to help you, I mean. Might would help you, doubt they would leave you bleeding or something. I mean, back in those days, they'd invite you in for lunch. Because you knew everybody. I played from here to the post office on my daddy's work. My grandparents lived right there. So this was my neighborhood, this house—West. I had cousins up there too. Just never gonna [inaudible].

TH: Must have been nice to have all your family so close too.

SG: And that's why school was so important because it was all families together, you know, all the kids in the room were either kin or real good friends. And it was just like everybody was into each other. So now, it all changes.

TH: Yeah? When you think it started changing most?

SG: It must have been in the late 90s, 2000s. And suddenly it was—but it's always been a slow changing.

TH: Have you seen a lot with the development recently on Harkers Island, especially?

SG: Yeah. More houses. Of course, they're all high up, you know, big houses. Which, they have to be because the tide's coming in. And this house is high up because I had to raise it. I would have never raised it if I hadn't had to. I know why they built those houses so high up is because you have to. Eventually, everything's gonna have to be high up because eventually because it's just—the tide's coming in. Like our dock; we have the main dock and then we have a lower dock so you can get down and get from the lower dock into the dock easier. So, we didn't nail the boards down on the lower dock because in a storm, the waves push on the boards and pull the post up. And putting the post down is more expensive and hard work than just putting the boards back. So we said, we fixed it so we could just put the boards there and they would be loose. And then when the wave and the storm came up, they would just wash the boards off.

TH: That's so smart.

SG: But you can get boards cheaper and easier than you can put the post down.

TH: And that went on for years. In the spring, we put the boards down, and hurricane season, first hurricane of course, we had to take them up. And then most time we just leave them up for the rest of winter because we weren't really going out that much. But now it's like every normal high tide. If it's real windy, they'll wash off -- which that didn't happen—well that was in the 90s when we moved here for good. Say the early 90s, that didn't happen. But now, just like this week, it was a little bit windy and it was high tide and the waves were breaking up. So as the boards [inaudible], they would wash off. And that wasn't a storm. That was just a normal little wind and a normal high tide.

TH: Are you getting a lot of shoreline erosion up here, too?

SG: Yeah. We had to put rocks. If we hadn't put rocks, they would all washed away and it've been up to the house. So to save what we had, we had to put rocks. I don't like the rocks. They don't look good, but that was the choice. Rocks or your land is washing away. Like with raising the house, I didn't want to do that either. But it's either that or lose the house. That's the way that goes.

TH: What's the alternative?

SG: Yeah.

TH: What did you not like about raising the house? Was it just the way it looked or -?

SG: Well, I mean I had seen it so long on the ground. The style of the house--it looked better down. One of my exchange students came back last year and that's the first time she had been back since it had been raised. And after she was here a couple days, she said, " I worried about it because I was afraid the house wouldn't have the same feeling." She said, "But it does."

TH: So it still feels like home?

SG: Still feels like home, the house she knew.

TH: That must have been comforting?

SG: Yeah, but it took me a while to get used to. It's so high up. Of course the view is wonderful. I had a good viewing, but it's just a higher up.

TH: I saw the ramp out there, too. Yeah. Was that when you raised the house—did you decide to put in the ramp just for easier access?

SG: They were putting steps in, and I said now --well I was 78 years old when they raised it— seventy-six maybe. And I'm in good physical condition now, but who knows when you're not gonna be able to walk. So I said, "Plan me a ramp." Wheelchair accessible. Everything wheelchair accessible. So that I can get up and down. Of course, one day I'm not gonna be able to climb those steps, so. My carpenter was real good at fixing the ramp in between this house and the summer kitchen so it doesn't look too bad.

TH: No, I didn't think it looked bad at all. No.

SG: It's an extensive ramp.

TH: It is.

SG: We can go look at it, but. It's an extensive ramp, but I had company in May, and the man was on one of those motorized chairs. And he just went up the ramp upstairs, and we were all—we took the stairs, and he just took his little scooter and went right up it.

TH: Glad that it works for you.

SG: So it works out. Because I have a lot of friends now that would not be able to come see me if I didn't have the ramp because the just can't walk up steps anymore. My brother takes the steps b because he said that the ramp's too long. But I end up taking the ramp 90% of the time. I hardly ever take the stairs.

TH: It's easier.

SG: It is! I have a baby stroller that a roll around and I bring groceries, I just shuttle 'em right up to the [inaudible]. Stuff in the stroller and just roll it right up the ramp.

TH: Oh, I love that idea.

SG: And the baby stroller will roll right into the house. We had company the past weekend, and she had her suitcase in it and she said it'd be nice if it would go right on into the bedroom. So I pulled it right on into the bedroom. Didn't have to because we were able to pick it up, but I just wanted to show her that it would actually do that.

TH: Maybe there's some good things about—

SG: Yeah, there are some good things.

SG: Baby stroller's real handy for anybody that is having any difficulty walking.

TH: I didn't know that.

SG: It's kinda like a walker, but you can carry stuff in it. But you can get baby strollers pretty cheap at different places. I think the one I've got now is a [inaudible], and it's in excellent condition, and it was like $20. It's a jogging stroller, so it has big wheels and they roll real good on the ground. If you know anyone that's old and having a tough time getting around, it's pretty handy. Maybe it doesn't look as bad as a walker [laughs].

TH: I think it'd look a little bit trendy too. You have the ones with the big wheels?

SG: Yep. I just walk and get my groceries and walk back.

TH: That's [inaudible].

SG: It's true [laughter].

TH: Do you have a lot of friends who have had to do the same thing to raise their house and put ramps in too?

SG: Yeah. But I don't see as many ramps. I guess now most people get elevators. I have a friend that had back surgery, and he had an elevator put in, and it's real handy when he goes from his garage to the first floor and then the second floor. So he just get right out of his car, put his groceries in the elevator and come up. As many times as I go up and down that ramp, I would have worn the elevator out. And see, his elevator, it'll take a walker, but I guess you could put a wheelchair in it. But like the man that was here with the scooter, he could have gotten up with that scooter with the elevator.

TH: It's expensive, too, an elevator. I can't imagine most people would have the money to afford that.

SG: Yeah. But most of these high houses that you see here, I bet you do have one. Because it's a job taking groceries up that many steps. Now I just soon as [inaudible] anything or take it. Furniture. I got a china closet—huge, it covers the whole walls in three sections. But they just put it on one of those dollies and rolled it right up the ramp. But it would've been hard for them to take it up those stairs, so. I've had some big things like that.

TH: Ok. So you've got your ramp and you've got the riprap out there. Do you feel pretty safe from future storms or do you think you're gonna have to do more adjustments to the house?

SG: I think it's about all I can do. In fact, my niece last week said—her house is not raised up—she said, "When we have a hurricane, I'm coming down here." So I may get a lot of company. Because the tide in Florence came in her garage, but it didn't come in her house. But it did come in her garage and ruin a lot of stuff they had in her garage. But it didn't come in her house. So anything bigger than Florence is going to come in her house. And she lives on the canal on the North side of the island, and the tide comes over their canal bank lot of times when these wind goes North and the full moon. When they first moved there, it didn't do that.

TH: And does it flood the roads back there too?

SG: I think it's flooded the roads down at Shell Point, but I don't think it's flooded any roads here. But it certainly could.

TH: And do you have a generator here too?

SG: I've got a small, not a whole house generator. I've got a big generator. During Florence, I ran my freezers. But the whole house generator, that would be one thing that I would need to get. I hadn't thought about the generator. Because in Florence, my cousin in Gloucester has a whole house generator. So she had electricity, so I would go over there and shower.

TH: Well, I'm wondering if we could talk a little bit about just your experience with hurricanes in general since you've been Down East, and which ones were you here for first of all?

SG: I have never left even as a child. There was one when I was a child when my grandmother from Morehead came down here to get us because she was afraid it was, we were gonna be washed away. And my daddy said he was not gonna leave because the water went around the island. And of course, mother said she was not gonna leave. She wasn't gonna leave him. We all stayed and grandmother went back. But even hurricanes, when I was a child, was real exciting, of course. It was a storm, and we got more snacks and mother would always buy some candy, build some up. It was exciting until you grew up and were the owner of the house. And then the storms became a lot worse because it was your stuff that was getting blown around. Still, storms are kind of exciting as long as your house is not blowing around. It's a lot of hard work. You have to tie everything down. You have to move everything up. And you've got the cleaning up too. As a child, you don't worry about that kind of stuff. But as an adult, the storms are worse. So that's the way that is. And all during the year when you're planning something, when you're planting or when you're fixing something, it's like, well, that's one more thing I'm gonna have to move. That chair will be alright there, but I'm gonna have to move it.

TH: So you have to be thinking about that all year.

SG: Because then company's not gonna be there to help you move it. You got to move it yourself. That kind of plays into your head. If it's down on the ground, well in a hurricane it floods. So I had to build the chicken pen up high. I've got a high-rise chicken coop [laughter].

TH: They must have a good view.

SG: Because in a hurricane and in these in these normal high tides and full moon times, the tide comes up there where the pen is and comes under the pen. And the old [inaudible] comes up in it. I mean even the chicken pen is getting raised.

TH: So many things to think about and prepare. So for Florence, it was originally supposed to be a category four, is that right?

SG: I guess so, I don't remember what it was. I think it was the worst one we've had.

TH: And you were there for Florence. What kind of preparing did you do then as you heard that Florence was coming?

SH: Well, you moved everything down [inaudible]. Because if you don't move it, it's gonna be moved. Probably where you don't want it moved [laughs]. I had a skiff that was up on this ramp thing and that blew over into the marsh into the neighbor's yard. And it was in the safest place it could have been, I mean, it was tied down everything. It was like well that'll be alright—it was on that ramp and it should be okay. But sometimes what should be is not. We had a lot of help after Florence—people are real good about coming and going. Some men came here and over there just picked the whole thing up and tore it down [a tree].

TH: How soon after Florence hit were people out here helping you?

SG: Well, immediately. The church people, they came. Some up from Virginia, they came and stayed and just—I called a number and they said, "We'll come to your house." Cut up the trees that are down, they did to mine. They just had the equipment and knew what they were doing. Take five or six men with chainsaws and they can do a whole lot in a short time. But there's a lot I've had to do myself, but I had some help.

TH: What kinds of things were you doing yourself?

SG: Well, it was just moving limbs.

TH: Did you have a lot trees down around your house?

SG: At the time I had—when I got married, we built Northside so I still owned that at the time of the storm. I was in the process of selling it, so I had to take care of here. Here is oak trees, so they didn't really blow down, but I had little limbs and stuff. The other house—a couple of big pine trees were down that really had to be cut and moved.

TH: But the house was ok?

SG: The house was ok, and the water didn't come in that house. It came up all around it, but it didn't come in.

TH: So you didn't have any problems with mold there or here after?

SG: No. When we built the house, it was supposed to be ground level. And my dad, he said don't build at ground level. I think there was a rule of maybe two blocks, everything maybe two blocks higher. And he said, "You need

to be able to build it higher," because the tide's coming and coming in. He was afraid that the island that they built to the bridge was going to stop the water from going on around as fast and it was going to flood. So far, I don't think that's happened. Still, it's able to get around it enough. But the tide's coming up everywhere, and it's global warming. I can see it.
TH: When do you first remember noticing or noticing a change made you think this is something different?

SG: In the '90s.

TH: Different how?

SG: The tide.

TH: At the time, it seems like people weren't really paying that much attention. Is that true to you?

SG: Yeah. It wasn't that evident. But see, as the tides keep coming in, more and more, the ground level water is salter. So you look at oak trees and the trees that need the freshwater.

TH: Like between Davis and Stacy.

SG: Yeah. That's why you're getting ghost forests everywhere.

TH: When did you first hear that term "ghost forest"?

SG: That was in the 2000s, I think.

TH: You heard it earlier than a lot of other people. Do you remember who you first heard it from, or was it on the news?

SG: I don't know. I think it was on the news. We were going to Florida and South Carolina and saw this big place where you cross the bridge and all these trees are dead. It's like, doesn't work [inaudible]. So it's a changing world.

TH: Yeah. When you see those ghost forests, do you feel worried, or how did they make you feel? What do they mean to Down East do you think?

SG: Well, it's kind of sad because you realize it's happening, and if those trees are dying, the trees in your yard will be the same way. I would really hate to lose that big oak tree, but eventually—I mean it would have already happened if we hadn't put those rocks, the water would've been up. The lot next door next to me doesn't have those rocks, and so that's washing away past mine. So I might—I really need some more rocks down the side. But recently here's been some people looking at that, so I think they might have bought it. They may be planning to build something over there. If they do, they're gonna have to put rocks there because it's washing away. Hope they know that [inaudible]. I was talking to the man that put my rocks down, and he said, "Well, let's just wait a little while and hope they do."

TH: Do they tell people that they're going to have to put down rocks when they buy?

SG: No, I don't think there's any rule. Because the rule is if you put rocks down—let's see. Ours had washed away. And then the lot on that side already had rocks, but then ours had washed away, but they wouldn't let us

put ours as far as that one was. So we couldn't reclaim what had been washed away. So this lot on the other side, they're not goin' to be able to reclaim it. They've lost a good bit of land. They lost bet thirty, forty feet. The shoreline there as compared to where mine is now.

TH: Still sells at a good price, sounds like.

SG: Yes, oh yes. That lot is really low—see, most of it is marsh—so I don't know what they're going to do. If you've got money, you can do most anything.

TH: Ms. Guthrie, do you think that Harkers Island and just Down East in general is recovered from Florence, or is there still recovery to be done?

SG: I think, on the island I think it's pretty much recovered. I don't know if Davis and down that way, I don't know if there're still houses down there that are still—I don't know. I think we're pretty much recovered.

TH: That's good to hear.

SG: But yet, in New Bern, those people are still not in their houses. They don't have the money to repair. And then after the storm, the mold did so much. I don't understand all this mold business. But houses that flooded, they stripped everything out through most of the way. It seems like some of that stuff could have been saved. If it's a wooden table, you can wash it off, I would think.

TH: It's good that you don't have trouble with mold I suppose.

SG: I have mildew show up here and there and there's nothing you can do about it. I guess I'm just gonna have to learn to live with it.

TH: Do think the difference between here and New Bern in terms of recovery from Florence --Why do you think it's so much worse down there is it just because of the flooding was worse down there or the community?

SG: No, I guess the flooding was worse here, but parts of New Bern really flooded, and it must have been quite low income areas. I was surprised the other day I was some group was working on some houses that the people had never gotten into, so that was like it's been such a long time. Where have they been?

TH: I talking to Robbie Phillips the other day you know, I'm sure you know her. The Carteret Long Term Recovery Alliance. Yeah. And she was talking about they still have 200 families on their list. I was surprised at. Just people still waiting.

SG: What are they waiting for?

TH: I think roofs and houses is what I'm hearing, and then that the money is short.
in the houses, because what I'm hearing and then the money is short.

SG: When was Florence?

TH: 2018. Right, almost five years ago.

SG: Because my husband died in ’17. That was the first storm after he died, so it must have been ’18 or ’19. It seems like things would be—that they wouldn’t have so many people still waiting.

TH: Yes, and apparently the long term mental and emotional impact was pretty bad. Did you see that at all?

SG: Well, it seemed like here things recovered faster. I mean I don’t know anybody over here who’s waiting for their house to be fixed. If you're on the waiting list [inaudible] long time. Cause I went to check on getting help to raise the house, and it was like, well it will be five or six years before they can ever consider it. I can't wait five or six years. So I just, I didn’t get any help raising the house. I guess some places, if you wait long enough they’ll come do it. But I didn’t have that kind of time. Because the storm’s coming next year, whether you’re ready or not.

TH: So the government wanted you to wait five or six years—is that common?

SG: I guess it is six years before you could ever be your application could be considered. There were so many applications, so they didn’t give me much encouragement to wait around and see if I could get anything. Just got to do it yourself. This man from Carrboro that came down—he called Karen and said if you know someone who could put a tent up, I’ve got a chainsaw and I’ll come down and help. So she—this was right after Florence—so she called me and asked me if I knew anywhere, and at the time I still had the other house. I getting ready to sell it, and it didn’t have anything in it but it was hooked up to whatever, and I said well he can stay in my house. He’s got his camping stuff, he won’t have to put up his tent—he can just [inaudible]. So he did. He stayed [inaudible] days and worked real hard to help a whole bunch of people. And since the, we became good friends. And we became good friends and ever since then, he comes back all the time. Can’t stay away. Doesn’t have to have his tent.

TH: You look out for him very well.

SG: He and his wife come often [inaudible, wind].

TH: For the next storm, I mean, what kind of resources do you think that you need to be prepared or that Harkers island in general needs?

SG: I don’t know. It’s a hard question. Harkers Island has the water system, so even if the electricity is off, water. The other communities—Gloucester and Smyrna up there—they have water pump, they pump their own water. So, whenever electricity’s off, they don’t get water. That’s a really important thing. That’s one thing that helped the island because that we did have the water system. My husband was involved with starting that in the early 70s. He was one of the men that formed the committee to help start the water system. You know, it’s really good, our water. You can light a match, but water’s hard to get to.

TH: Did they start all of that because of the hurricanes and wanting to be prepared?

SG: Yep. And to get good water. Everybody at that time had their own well. Different wells, different places. The water [inaudible] probably not being as safe to drink as treated water. And he had his water pump, that’s always great. So, my daddy said, “Be the first person to sign up, so you don’t have to worry about the water pump.”

TH: Was that something that people really took to quickly, that they liked?

SG: Yeah, oh yeah. I mean, it was, to me it was [inaudible, wind], but as much as it is now, I have no idea what it costs now. It was not expensive, but most of [inaudible, wind] real fast. They had to put all these big pipes down and underground. The whole island was dug up, I mean, looked like a war zone. Had big pipes had to go down to the edge of the road and off to peoples' houses. It was a real mess.

TH: What years was this?

SG: That was—we got married in '67—it was probably '68 or '69 that they started it.

TH: Took a couple of years?

SG: Yeah, just to get it all done. And see the people now, the young people now have no idea. It was just the persistence there. They've got no idea how many meetings those people took. It was like every week [inaudible]. I remember that what they thought water was [inaudible, wind]. And the Fire Department, for instance, they were the same thing. That started from scratch. The first fire truck that they bought was a hearse. And our communities—I guess they could—but you just can't do much in a hearse. There's not much room. And now we've got that nice new [inaudible, wind]. Now there's—it's just volunteers. Since Irene, the first ones they parkted with ambles first thing at the water tower. Because the water system was already going. And so all the workers they were members zoomed down there to go on the run. That was kind of an exciting thing, but now it goes and comes and we don't even notice it. So that took a lot of doing.

TH: A lot of people pulling hard together.

SG: Right, and see, the museum is same thing—just workers deciding we should do this museum and then it goes and goes and goes. And now we got the museum, so. I don't think we're working together like we used to, like I said about the school. If the school needed something and you told the parents, it would eventually get done. It's like, well we need some swings. It's like ok, let's have raffles, and we had raffles and bake sales and we made the money to buy the swings. And I don't think there's any of that there now, but the parents came out and built these fort things out of wood. A little climbing thing for the children. Just tell two or three parents, and get people together and then daddies are out there building the fort. Now it's all this new metal stuff—which is good because at the time we didn't have that. Too expensive. So everyone usually works together. So you have that group now called the bring back the lights group.

TH: Can you tell me a little bit more about their mission?

SG: I don't really know that much about except some years ago, we realized that there were so many houses over here that people didn't live in the wintertime. Before that, most of the houses were local people so they were here Christmas and everybody's house was decorated. Then when they started building these beach houses, and they weren't here, they're not decorated. So it was kinda dark. So we've gotta [inaudible] see if we can get more decorations, get the lights up during Christmas. Now I think now they've raised [inaudible] well they put that tree and that welcoming sign. It still goes on. It's just good to see. But I don't know if it's as strong as it used to be. Bring Back the Lights group is real strong, but I think they need more people. I never know.

TH: I wondering, I want to ask you some questions about what you think Harkers Island will be like in the future—was kind of what we were already talking about --but can you imagine 50 or 100 years in the future, what do you think will be going on on Harkers Island [laughs]?

SG: It's like what will be going on anywhere. I don't know. There will probably be condos and hotels. Hotels. The only thing that's kept that from already being is that we don't have a sewer system. There is a sewer system [inaudible], but that's not linked to the big sewer system. When the sewer system comes in, you can build anything. That's what's kept some of the building off. The water company originally was Harkers Island Water and Sewage, but they forgot to do the sewage because it was so expensive. And then people kept saying, if you can't do the sewage system, then you're going to have more water. So it's kinda like yes, we need this, but maybe we shouldn't do it. When that comes then it will be more people. But the good thing about here is that we have Cape Lookout and we have Core Banks and we have Shackleford Banks, they're run by the government. So nothing will over there. I guess in a hundred years from now, that might change. But it'll be a long time before anything can be done over there, which is a good thing. I mean, we had a camp over there. I have been going over there since I was born, but we always knew that the government would eventually take it over, so we said we'll just use it as long as we can. But when they do take it over it'll be the best thing because nothing will be built there, and we can still go there and camp out. And I can sit here and look at it, and it's still the same Banks that it was in the 40s and 50s. But, which makes me feel better. If I was sitting here and it was a big hotel over there, it would be worse. Because if it was built up like Atlantic Beach, I couldn't go there anymore. So that's a good thing.

TH: So how often did you go as a little girl to the Cape and Shackleford?

SG: My dad had a camp at Shackleford up until Hazel washed it away. So we would go weekends, every weekend or so if the weather was good.

TH: You had a boat?

SG: Yeah, we had a boat. And then when I got married, my husband's family actually owned some land over there, and so we built a nice house. It was insulated, had three bedrooms, had gas lights, gas refrigerator, and we had that from sixty-seven until they took it, which was eighty-five I think.

TH: Do you know what's happened to it now? Is that house still standing?

SG: No, no. There's no houses over there. They all—they all burned. We took everything and they burned. All the houses over there burned.

TH: I'd heard that some people burned them before the Park Service burned them?

SG: I don't think it was the Park Service that actually burned them, I think it was the owners that burned each one of them, and they were kind of afraid that when they left, the Park Service would use them—although they probably would have. I don't know. Because they have to use some for Core Banks. There's some structures—see Shackleford is a wilderness area. Core Banks is not the same rule as Shackleford, so you can't have any building any motorized vehicle, but the Park Service has built some bathrooms out there. There are motorized vehicles now, which I don't think much of that.

It was the best thing for future generations. I had my time over there. I'm too old now to go and come like I did and carry a [inaudible] over there. It would just be too much trouble for me now. So, when we lost it, we had a big thirty foot boat. So then we went over in our boat and stay the weekends [inaudible] oysters or whatever. And we just moved from the land to the boat, which was good. And as time passed, we got older where we weren't able to do that. It was good while it lasted. Now, I've got this and the house over there. If I was thirty

years old, I'd have a house over there and be anchored over there where our camp used to be. I'd go all the time I think. But I'm seventy-nine [inaudible, wind].

TH: Do you think future generations on Harkers Island will go over there still?

SG: Yeah, I think they will. There's a lot of people now [inaudible, wind]. It's not easy to get to it, it's deep water right up to the shore, so that's where everybody goes. Right now, I do still go over there with our friends that have [inaudible] and we'll go to the same place, walk to the same beach that we always did when the girls come back and visit from Germany. It's just like it was. There's more growth, more vegetation. But this side of it over here by the Sound is washing away. There's places over there where [inaudible, wind], our house would be in the water if it was still there. But we built our house way back from the Sound, because Jack Sith was washing away, so he realized --that was in the 60s—why are you going to build a house way back here? Because it's washing away, and he realized that.

TH: Granville Forsyth.

SG: Sister—two sisters and a cousin—had one just down from ours and theirs was supposed to [inaudible], well they don't have to walk as far as we did to get to their houses because it's washin' away. And like I said now, their houses would be in the water. So this global warming has been coming a long time, it's just now that everybody—you see it on the news.

TH: It's unfortunate.

SG: Global warming. It's above my pay grade. Somebody else is gonna have to figure that out.

TH: Are you concerned about if your property will still be here in, say, 25 years?

SG: Oh yeah, it'll be here. Now that the house is raised it will be here. And I don't have any thought of selling. It'll go to a family member. It'll always be in the family. I would hope. So far, I think it will for the next hundred years. But you don't know. You leave something to somebody, there's just no telling. But I think the family I have, I think it'll be kept in the family, which is good. This morning I was cleaning the shrimp out on the porch and I was thinking, my dad never thought that I'd be here cleaning shrimp on this porch. Never on a raised house. But he instilled in the three of us that this was an important piece of land. Like I said, my brother's moved away—in the Navy, in the Coast Guard and worked away. I was the one that stayed here. And my brother, the oldest brother died, but the one next to me lived—but when he comes down, he doesn't know anybody. See, he's eighty-two, so most of his friends are gone or dead or are not out and around. So when he comes down, and we go out to eat or something, he won't know anybody and I'll have to say, "Oh that's so and so." And he's like, "Oh that is!" He's been gone so long.

TH: Does it still feel like home to him?

SG: I think the house and this land feels like home to him, but I think the island has changed so much to him, It's completely different. And due to his age, the older you get the less people are around that you knew. My husband's brother-in-law [Houston Salter] is 103, so for him, it's really changed. Hardly anybody left for generations. [wind interrupts audio] But his house is in the middle of the island near that Methodist church.